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ABSTRACT

As a step toward the study of invention, an investigation dealt not with public arguments or the results of invention, but with arguments that may have occurred to the rhetor but were discarded. To avoid problems of self-presentation and retrospection, thinking aloud and reconstructive protocols were avoided in favor of providing 37 college students with a list of arguments they might have generated, and asking them why some of those arguments would be inappropriate. The Marwell and Schmitt list was chosen for the study because (1) it is reasonably detailed, (2) it is not strange in that the exemplars are straightforward, (3) the procedure allows subjects to select or reject as many arguments as they wish, and (4) the focus is the editing experience of going through the list, not the process of actually generating arguments. By coding subject responses according to a set of categories in roughly hierarchieal order, it was found that subjects edited on the basis of estimates of effectiveness, bias against certain kinds of arguments, self and interpersonal concerns, and a recognition that competent discourse must be true and relevant. The study concludes that the experiment design is workable, the coding system has reasonable validity, and the interesting results warrant further testing in more elaborate investigations. (A copy of the coding system is appended.) (CRH)

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ROADS NOT TAKEN, ARGUMENTS NOT MADE

By

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Abstract

The usual way of thinking about invention is to center on the production of arguments. This paper focuses instead on the rejection of arguments. Its central concern is to try to describe the criteria people use to edit their persuasive strategies. Subjects were exposed to a list of potential arguments for a situation, and asked to say which they would not use, and why. A coding scheme was developed for these comments. People's rationales--and hence their editing criteria--seem to fall into these four categories: effectiveness, bias against certain kinds of arguments, interpersonal concerns, and principles for competent discourse. The general design of the study seems to be an appropriate way to begin generating a description of people's naive theories of invention.

Paper presented to the Central States Speech Association, Chicago, April 1984. This general approach had its birth in some conversations I had with Brant Burleson of Purdue University. I also wish to thank Judith M. Dallinger for helping to code the data.

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ROADS NOT TAKEN, ARGUMENTS NOT MADE

Typically, we study arguments by centering on texts. That is, we look at public arguments, and we ask, for instance, "what kind of argument is this?" "how does this discourse function argumentatively?" and, more rarely, "how did this argument get here?" This last question is the one which most clearly has to do with invention, if we understand this term to mean creation or production. Considering that invention is our first canon, I find it ironic that we know so much less about argument generation than about the public form and content of argument, which can be rather clearly distinguished from invention, and perhaps even assigned to other canons.

This study takes a modest, hesitant step toward the study of invention. My present interest is not so much about public arguments--the results of invention--as about how and why those arguments, of all possible arguments, are produced. I think it important to begin with the realization that not all arguments which occur to the rhetor are made. For this reason, we would neglect a rich domain of data if we concerned ourselves chiefly--or exclusively--with arguments which do eventually appear in public. In principle, I suppose that if we had a complete account of why certain end products were chosen, we would have a fairly full theory of invention. But if we are realistic about our chances of contriving a full account of any human activity, we will not choose to start this project with such a limitation.

Somehow, therefore, we must investigate arguments which are not made--arguments which "come to mind," but are rejected for some reason. I can think of no methodology for doing this which is not vulnerable to some critical objections. The most obvious tack is to ask people "what did you reject?" but we are unlikely to get good data in this way. Respondents will be hesitant to put themselves in a bad light by reporting thoughts they judged to be stupid or offensive (Rosenberg, 1969). Some arguments or ideas may have been rejected when

they were no more than flickers of thought, and so would not be recoverable without massive memorial reconstruction anyway (Ericsson & Simon, 1980). Even the use of thinking-aloud protocols would not fully escape the problems of self-presentation and retrospection.

The main alternative to asking people about their own rejected arguments is to provide them with a list of arguments they might have generated, and ask them why some of those arguments would be inappropriate. The chief threat here is that the list may contain arguments which would not have occurred spontaneously to the respondents, and might omit others. Looking at the proffered list, a person might spot an argument better than the one s/he would have invented, and therefore reject what would have been his/her natural production. Or the person might not find the "right" argument on the list, and feel obliged to claim one which s/he would never make.

Nonetheless, I have chosen to use this method here. The problems are by no means avoided, but are somewhat minimized by these considerations: (1) The list used--that of Marwell and Schmitt (1967)--is reasonably detailed. Assuming that an individual is unlikely to consider more than a handful of possible arguments in a brief episode (Miller, 1956), the inclusion of 16 strategies generously simulates a large domain of possible choices. (2) The list does not seem to be a strange one. Though it is not always simple to explain all the theoretical categories to people (e.g., "negative altercasting"), the exemplars are straightforward. Versions of the list have been used in countless classes and numerous experiments (e.g., Roloff & Barnicott, 1978) without any obvious evidence of foreignness.[1] (3) The procedures allow subjects to select or reject as many arguments as they wish. So even if a person selects an argument which would not naturally have "come to mind," the other choices may still simulate actual argumentation with an acceptable level of validity. (4) The editing

experience of going through the list is the focus here, not the process in which the arguments are actually generated. If I may crudely divide invention into creating and editing,[2] it is the latter which I hope to describe. Even if the list does not stand in very well for natural creativity, we can still hope that this will not seriously alter the editing process. The only systematic bias which occurs to me is that people may be more likely to reject a listed argument than one to which their cognitive effort may commit them. In terms of this study's methodology, however, false rejections do not present a serious validity problem, since they will presumably be justified on the same kinds of grounds as true rejections.

But when I ask people to explain their rejections, and code their answers, how close will we be to their actual editing standards? This important question is hard to answer cleanly. Nisbett and Wilson (1977) insist that people do not have privileged access to their cognitive processes, though they may be accurate in reporting their cognitive contents (see Ericsson & Simon, 1980; Hample, in press). This study is not designed to describe the process of editing (what memory stores are used? how are criteria cued up? when several arguments are edited, is this done in series or in parallel?), but rather its rationale. Still, the grounds for the edits (i.e., the warrants for the decision to reject) may not be in conscious awareness at the time of the editing, and so are probably unavailable as memories of specific decisions (see Hample, in press). So it would be unrealistic to suppose that the rationales I elicit are anything but rationalizations.

Even if the self-reports are not true accounts drawn directly from memory, they are still valuable. At the least, the self-reports should reflect subjects' naive theories of invention. At the most, reports may have a very close correspondence to the original rejection decisions, if we may suppose that people generate the justifications by repeating (rather than reviewing) the original editing process. So we will know at least how people think they ought

to edit, and perhaps how they actually do so. Our present inability to choose between these interpretations is frustrating, but apparently unavoidable for now.

So the general object of this first study in what will have to be a more elaborate research program is to examine people's argument-editing standards. This report, however, also has a more specific aim: to explore the methodological strategy of asking people to justify their rejections of experimenter-supplied arguments. We need to see if a useful coding system can be worked out, and if anything interesting is likely to emerge from this sort of study.

Procedure

Subjects were 37 undergraduate majors enrolled in a persuasion class. Pertinent topics, such as argument, compliance-gaining strategies and the conduct of conversations, had not been covered in class prior to the data elicitation. Participation in the study was voluntary, and took about 15 minutes. At its conclusion, students were debriefed and led in a discussion of the topics just mentioned.

Students were given a sheet of paper which presented one of Marwell and Schmitt's (1967, pp. 356-358) original vignettes: "Your teen-age son Dick, who is a high school student, has been getting poor grades. You want him to increase the amount of time he spends studying from 6 to 12 hours a week." Sixteen possible arguments followed. Students checked which they would use. This is the standard methodology for compliance-gaining strategies research which uses preset lists of arguments.

At the bottom of the page, students were asked to turn the sheet over and list the identifying number for each argument they did not select, "and give a sentence or two of explanation for why you did not choose it."[3] These comments are the data of chief interest here.

The coding system was developed in this way. I read through all the responses, taking notes on the ideas the students expressed. Those notes were

then revised, collapsing some themes into others, and creating new categories. The resultant system had 32 categories. A colleague and I began using this system, but after coding 15 subjects' responses, we were in agreement only 44% of the time, and showed no signs of improvement. Part of the difficulty, of course, was the coding system, but this was magnified by our problems in deciding what the students meant by their comments, which were often sentence fragments.

So I revised the system again, producing the one in Figure 1. The rationale for the instruction to use the higher-numbered code when in doubt is

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Insert Figure 1

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that the system is in a crude hierarchical order, from simple declarations that the strategy won't work (codes 1 and 2), to objections to certain kinds of arguments (codes 3, 4 and 5), to person-centered rationales (codes 6, 7, 8 and 9), and finally to objections based on general principles for the proper conduct of discourse (codes 10, 11 and 12). By prefering the highest plausible code for each response, subjects will be shown at their most sophisticated. (Each response was only coded into one category.)

Using this system, my colleague and I acheived 69% agreement, with a higher proportion in the latter stages of the task. Disagreements were resolved by means of discussions as we coded (though of course we coded independently). Most of our disagreements occured within the condensed categories to be presented later, primarily among codes 6, 7, 8 and 9. Therefore the results which condense the codes have substantially higher reliability than 69%.

Most of the items coded 13 (other) were statements of preference for some other argument. Nearly all of these were on the original list in some form. This offers some reassurance that the list of compliance-gaining strategies has no major

omissions. Only 3% of all responses were placed into code 13, which suggests that the other codes are adequate to describe students' responses.[4]

Results

Results of the coding are in Table 1, which displays the frequencies of each code for each compliance-gaining strategy. Subjects were willing to use 47% of the suggested arguments. Those strategies which were least acceptable

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Insert Table 1
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included strategies 8, 9, 10, 13 and 16, which correspond almost exactly (omitting only strategy 4) to Roloff and Barnicott's (1978) category called Psychological Force. Item 7 was also rarely endorsed; this, with strategy 2, comprises Roloff and Barnicott's Punishing Activity group. The remaining kinds of argument are called Pro-Social by Roloff and Barnicott, and tend to be preferred. Strategies 2 and 4 are the only ones which do not conform to what might have been predicted on the basis of Roloff and Barnicott's report.

Further examination of Table 1 indicates that several codes (1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 12) are very rarely pertinent. The first two of these are categories in which subjects give very little rationale for their decision to reject the potential argument, so their rarity is encouraging. Codes 3 and 4 involve a little more explanation--they may well represent principled objections to certain kinds of argument--but not enough to tell us much about subjects' editing grounds. The infrequency with which code 12 is used suggests that subjects are not very sensitive to the well-established finding that new information is considerably more persuasive than old (Wyer, 1974, pp. 223-228; Axelrod, 1977; Berlyne, 1970).

Table 1 also shows that several editing criteria are unique to specific compliance-gaining strategies. For instance, "don't prepay" is, naturally enough, a rationale only for strategy 6, which offers a reward before getting compliance.

And a straightforward objection to making morality an issue in this vignette (code 4) appears only for strategy 9, which is the only one with an explicit moral appeal. Code 6 is used chiefly for strategy 5, which some subjects seemed to think involves some syncophancy in this situation. However, all three of these strategies were rejected for other reasons as well, so the contingency is mainly in one direction.

Several of the codes have considerable applicability. Codes 7, 8 and 9, which all involve a concern for the persuadee's well-being or for the welfare of the relationship between the persuader and the target, are used to justify rejections of nearly any strategy. Almost as robust are codes 10 and 11, which operationalize two fundamental requirements for competent discourse, truth and relevance. The frequency with which code 5 appears is probably due to the degree of heavy-handedness implicit in Marwell and Schmitt's list; nonetheless, it is also used very frequently for strategies 1 and 6, which Roloff and Barnicott classify as Pro-Social.

Table 2 condenses the codes into four categories: the strategy won't work (codes 1 and 2), the strategy is objectionable on its face (codes 3, 4 and 5), the

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Insert Table 2

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strategy will harm a person or our relationship (codes 6, 7, 8 and 9), and the strategy violates basic principles of discourse (codes 10, 11 and 12). These combinations are made on an a priori basis.

Table 2 shows clearly that subjects rely most on person-centered rationales for choosing not to make certain arguments; 49% of the responses summarized in Table 2 fall into this category. Attention to truth, relevance and novelty of one's arguments accounted for 27% of these data. Only 4% of the responses provide so little rationale that they fall into the first category, and an additional 20%

of the responses object to a certain kind of strategy without giving any otherwise codable reasons. These results are encouraging, for they indicate that about 3/4 of the editing rationales are obviously thoughtful, and many of the remainder may be, even though the brief responses provided by the students had little intellectual content in these residual cases.

Table 3 condenses both the codes (as in Table 2) and the strategies (according to Roloff and Barnicott's [1978] reading of their factor analysis).

Insert Table 3

Though the exploratory nature of the present study generally mitigates against testing for statistical significance, the material in Table 3 deserves such a test. One might reasonably expect the kind of strategy to be related to the editing criteria, though one might be hard pressed to specify a clear hypothesis. Table 3 does show a significant contingency between editing category and strategy category (χ^2=43.804, df=6, p<.001). Moderate-sized measures of association (C=.359, V=.439, ϕ=.385) indicate that the statistical significance is not a fluke of sample size.

The most striking results in Table 3--and the cells which contribute most to the significant χ^2--are these. Far more responses than chance predicts fall into the Objectionable Strategy codes for Pro-Social strategies, while these reasons are rarely given for rejecting Psychological Force efforts. The opposite pattern appears for the Discourse rationales for these two categories of strategy. The data do not permit us to say whether the Objectional Strategy results appear because of the Discourse results, or vice versa. However, the logic of the coding scheme proposes that the first two categories of codes are used when subjects are unable to generate better reasons for their editing decisions. Therefore, we may tentatively suggest that people are less sensitive

to Discourse Competence considerations with Pro-Social strategies, and more sensitive when they are thinking about Psychological Force arguments. By a similar logic, we might wish to suggest that people are not very sensitive to discourse issues when they have a punishing strategy in mind.

Discussion

As I assume most readers are already well aware, there are several insuperable bars to generalizing any of this study's substantive results about the editing rationales, or the relation between them and the compliance-gaining strategies. Let me mention just a few: the lack of a basis in the literature for predicting any patterns; the few significance tests; the post hoc nature of the tests which were conducted; and the use of a single argumentative situation (see Jackson & Jacobs, 1983). So I will make no pretense of offering conclusions about the relationship between editing standards and types of argument, or about the content of people's editing schemes.

Nonetheless, this study's results offer some suggestions. The coding system is workable, and suggests that people edit on the basis of estimates of effectiveness, bias against certain kinds of arguments, self and interpersonal concerns, and a recognition that competent discourse must be true and relevant. These are interesting results--the last hints at an avenue for studying Grice's (1975) maxims about conversation, or Habermas' (1979, ch. 1) ideal speech situation--and certainly deserve to be tested thoroughly in more elaborately designed investigations.

The a priori hierarchy of editing standards implicit in the coding scheme--i.e., Effectiveness, then Strategy Bias, then Interpersonal Concerns, then Discourse Competence--suggests an editing sequence. This, if true, would be important information, so the hierarchy needs to be empirically confirmed. This might be done with stimuli designed to allow rejections which could be

modeled as a Guttman scale. Before engaging on a study of that sophistication, however, we probably need some assurance that the coding system used here would also emerge from data on a variety of argumentative situations and potential arguments. And, of course, the reliability of the coding system needs to be improved as well.

The specific purpose of this investigation has been to see if the general design of asking people to justify argument rejections from a preset list is worthwhile. My tentative judgment is that the design is workable, the coding system has reasonable validity, and that this sort of inquiry produces interesting results.

Footnotes

[1]I am not advocating the use of this or any other prescriptive list in compliance-gaining strategies research. The lists obtained by coding actual public arguments seem better grounded for most general research purposes (see, e.g., Wiseman & Schenck-Hamlin, 1981). I could as easily have used one of these inductive lists, but would have been using it in a prescriptive fashion anyway. The reader should keep in mind that this study is not aimed at generating a list of strategies, or even describing actual public arguments, as the compliance studies usually are.

[2]There are some historical precedents for this in the occasional division between invention and judgment (Cox, 1899; see Ong, 1958, pp. 112-116). My preference for keeping invention as the general term is, I think, a little more in line with what we usually mean by the word.

[3]In the debriefing period, I asked how many students changed an answer in order to avoid having to give another justification. Two people admitted changing one or two answers. Therefore, the data probably underrepresent rejections slightly.

[4]Code 1 is also serving partly as a residual category here. About 1% of the responses were coded there.

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Figure 1:

Coding System

Directions: If you are uncertain about which of two codes to apply, use the higher number (except for 13). Some ambiguous comments can be clarified by referring back to the list of compliance-gaining strategies, to see what the subject is talking about.

CODES	EXPLANATIONS
01	Only use arguments which will WORK. The subject gives no further codable rationale as to why the argument will fail. If the subject does give a codable rationale (e.g., "threats never work") code the answer under the rationale ("don't threaten").
02	Don't say things which could BOOMERANG TACTICALLY (i.e., which would make Dick's grades worse). If the subject seems to have in mind some sort of relational worsening, use 09. If the subject seems to have in mind some sort of personal boomerang for Dick, use 07. If the subject seems to have in mind some sort of personal boomerang for the arguer, use 06.
03	Don't PREPAY. Get the compliance first, then give the reward.
04	Don't make MORALITY an issue. If the problem with morality is that it is a false assumption, use 10. If the problem with morality is that it is irrelevant, use 11.
05	Don't THREATEN, BRIBE or PUNISH, or use any other negative or high-pressure tactics. If there is a rationale given, however, code it there (e.g., "you wouldn't want to live with Dick after you threaten him" would be 09).
06	Treat YOURSELF POSITIVELY. Don't do anything you'd regret or which would harm your image of yourself. Don't make yourself vulnerable to Dick; don't put yourself in his debt.
07	Don't HARM DICK. Don't hurt his feelings, or make him feel GUILTY or MAD. Don't do anything that will harm his present or future happiness or personality. But for questions of Dick's right to choose for himself, use 08.
08	Treat DICK POSITIVELY, as an independent, mature person. Let him make his own choices. Don't PROJECT your own desires or feelings onto him. Don't be SELFISH.
09	Preserve your RELATIONSHIP with Dick. Don't say things that could cause future problems in the relationship. The subject should mention (or clearly have in mind) the relationship. For comments which point only to injury to Dick's self-image, use 07 or 08; for comments which point only to injury to the parent's self-image, use 06.
10	Use only TRUE arguments or assumptions. Don't rely on false premises about debts or moral issues or anything else. Be HONEST.
11	Only use RELEVANT arguments. Don't use any which you or Dick or anyone else would perceive as irrelevant to the issue.
12	Be NOVEL and informative. Don't say obvious things, or things Dick already knows.
13	OTHER. This category especially includes suggestions as to what the subject would prefer to be arguing (e.g., "I wouldn't use this one because the last one is better").

Table 1:

Raw Data

CODE[1]	STRATEGY[2] 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
99	19	21	32	25	21	4	11	7	5	11	34	29	4	17	31	9	280
01					1		1	1	1	1		1		2			8
02		1					1						1				3
03						9											9
04									3								3
05	11	4		2	2	15	6	1	1	1			1	1		3	48
06					7		1						1				9
07	2	1		1		2	3	8	6	8		1	10	1	1	7	51
08	2	1	1	1	2	1	3	5	1	3	1	1	1	13	1	4	41
09	1	7		2	1	4	6	3	2	3			7	1	2	5	44
10			2	4	2			4	8	6	1	5	9	1		2	44
11		1	2	2		1	3	6	6	2			2	1	1	2	29
12									1	2	1				1	2	7
13	2	1			1	1	2	2	3				1			3	16

Note. N for each column is 37. The sum for the whole table is 592.

[1]Code 99 means that the argument was endorsed by the subject. The other codes are explained in Figure 1.

[2]Here are the strategy codes: 1=promise, 2=threat, 3=expertise (positive), 4=expertise (negative), 5=liking, 6=pre-giving, 7=aversive stimulation, 8=debt, 9=moral appeal, 10=self-feeling (negative), 11=self-feeling (positive), 12=altercasting (positive), 13=altercasting (negative), 14=altruism, 15=esteem (positive), and 16=esteem (negative). Due to an inadvertent typing error, items 10 and 11 were reversed from their order in Marwell & Schmitt (1967), but the other numberings correspond to theirs. See their paper for an explanation of each strategy.

Table 2:

Data with Condensed Codes

CONDENSED CODES[1]	STRATEGY[2] 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
Effectiveness (1&2)		1				1		2	1	1	1		1	1	2		11
Objectionable Strategy (3,4&5)	11	4		2	2	24	6	1	4	1			1	1		3	60
Person-Centered (6,7,8&9)	5	9	1	4	10	7	13	16	9	14	1	2	19	15	4	16	145
Discourse Competence (10,11&12)		1	4	6	2	1	3	10	15	10	2	5	11	2	2	6	80

Note. The sum for the whole table is 296. Remember that codes 99 and 13 from Table 1 are omitted here.

[1]See Figure 1 for an explanation of the orginal codes which are condensed here.

[2]See note 2 to Table 1 for an explanation of the strategies.

Table 3:

Condensed Strategies and Condensed Codes

CONDENSED CODES[1]	CONDENSED STRATEGIES,[2] f (%) Pro-Social (1,3,5,6,11, 12,14,15)	Psychological Force (4,8,9,10,13,16)	Punishment (2,7)	Total
Effectiveness (1&2)	4 (4%)	4 (3%)	3 (8%)	11 (3.7%)
Objectionable Strategy (3,4&5)	38 (36%)	12 (8%)	10 (26%)	60 (20.3%)
Person-Centered (6,7,8&9)	45 (43%)	78 (51%)	22 (56%)	145 (49%)
Discourse Competence (10,11&12)	18 (17%)	58 (38%)	4 (10%)	80 (27%)
Total	105	152	39	296

[1]See Figure 1 for an explanation of the original codes which are condensed here.

[2]See note 2 to Table 1 for an explanation of the original strategies which are condensed here.